By the Woman Who Fed the Fires of Poet M

Georgette Leblanc, Known to the World as Madame Maeterlinck (Bu

Surprising Story and Intimate Details of Extraordinary Romance of All Hist

IN the entire literary world of to-day there is probably no figure so conspicuous as Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian poet, novelist, playwright and mystic philosopher. And wherever the "Belgian Shakespeare" is known the poet's distinguished wife, Madame Georgette Leblanc Maeterlinck, has long been known and admired.

The literary and dramatic world knows that Georgette Leblanc, artiste, singer, actress, authoress and beauty, was Maeterlinck's inspiration. Not until the beautiful Georgette came into his life did the genius of Maeterlinck rise to its full richness.

When the poet conceived the idea for his famous "Blue Bird" it was Georgette who labored with him to work out the lines of the play, and it was Georgette who made its production possible and took a leading role in interpreting his dramatic masterpiece for the public.

But Georgette Leblanc was not Maeterlinck's wife. She was never married to Maeterlinck. "Mrs. Maurice Maeterlinck" she was known to the world of art, literature and culture—but it was a title assumed for the convenience of the poet.

Maeterlinck himself presented her to his friends as "Madame Maeterlinck," she presided at his home, he wrote her addressing her always as his wife, but never married her.

When the time came for Maeterlinck to marry he led to the altar, not Georgette Leblanc, his inspiring companion and helpmate, but a child, utterly lacking the rare qualities which Georgette possessed in such full measure. And when recently the great poet came to America to receive the honors and homage of the world of art, the drama, the opera, literature and fashionable society the child-wife, "Silver Tassel," stood by his side to share the triumphs, while Georgette Leblanc, who had contributed so much to his fame, was left behind.

The astonishing romance of Maeterlinck and Georgette Leblanc is, perhaps, without a parallel in real life, and few no or even movie scenario writers have had the courage to ima human relationship so unique.

As a young girl in a small French city Georgette read dered and worshipped with fluttering heart the poems of th away Belgian poet and dedicated her life to her unseen hero single-minded purpose was to fit herself for intellectual comp ship with this genius, to some day offer to him anything, thing that was hers—everything of mind or spirit or bea body to feed the consuming flame of Maeterlinck's genius. turn she asked nothing.

The story of this extraordinary romance is for the firs told from week to week on this page by Georgette Leblanc h —how she bargained with a devoted lover for a loveless ma so she could advance herself on the path toward Maeterlinc resolutely fought off the new husband's advances and preserved her maidenly sanctity for the man she was saving herself for.

And how this young bride became a wife in name only to the man she married for her own ends—and later became a wife in all but the legal ceremony to the poet Maeterlinck.

And when, after years of unselfish devotion to Maeterlinck, asking no reward, never suggesting marriage, she found his interest cooling, she brought in a young girl and offered her to feed his genius and entertain him—and stepped philosophically down and out of Maeterlinck's life.

Georgette Leblanc as "Light" in the famous "Blue Bird."

By Georgette Leblanc

CHAPTER IV.

She Sacrifices Her Operatic Career to Be Near Maeterlinck.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

Copyright, 1921, by International Feature Service, Inc.

IN placing before my American readers the great problem of my life—the gaining of my freedom to follow my art and to fulfill my destiny—I may have puzzled them by too brief a reference to my artistic training and ambitions.

I did not win a position on the operatic stage without long and arduous preparation. A natural aptitude for music, the heaven-sent gift of a fine voice, a passionate devotion to this art, even above all the other fine arts, years of intense, tireless study, both in childhood and in later years, the eager grasping of all opportunities that presented themselves—all these things helped to prepare me for the stage.

Two steps were essential to the fulfilment of my destiny—first, the "loveless marriage," which I have described, that gave me freedom from my father's control, and, second, the gaining of a position as a musical artist in order that I might support myself.

Through constant struggles and misunderstaandings in my childhood I laid the foundation of my career as a musical artist. To those who have only a slight understanding of the French provinces it may come as a surprise to hear that there is any prejudice anywhere in France against the opera and the stage. As a matter of fact, in Normandy, where I was brought up, going to the theatre was regarded in good society as a sin.

In these grim, gloomy surroundings I grew up with a passionate devotion to music and all the arts. When I was a little girl of fifteen a kindly keeper of a music book store in Rouen introduced me surreptitiously to the great Massenet, who has always been one of my favorite composers. He listened to me singing the beautiful prayer of Manon, when repulsed by Des Grieux, from his own most exquisite opera, and other favorite pieces of my girlhood. Finally Massenet said to me:

"Sing, little bird, sing, and some day a beautiful prince will open the door of your cage and you will live happily ever afterwards!"

The wonderful words of Massenet encouraged me to seize every opportunity I could find for musical education, and thus I achieved an extraordinarily precocious musical training.

When the court had given me freedom from my unwelcome husband I presented myself with the daring of inexperience at the great Opera Comique, the famous classic home of high-class light opera.

I sang and acted two scenes I had learned in the midst of my ordeals and, incredible as it must sound, I was engaged on the spot for three years at a generous salary, and it was promised that I should make my debut the following Autumn in a new creation. Never probably in the annals of operatic art has there been a more remarkable beginning than mine.

I was then living independently in my studio in the Avenue Victor Hugo, Paris, with my faithful servant, Eugenie, who saved me.

I threw myself into the new life, as an eager swimmer plunges into the ocean, without forethought, prudence or fear. Bourgeois society in the past had oppressed me, men and love had been symbolized for me by a poor wretch whom my denials turned into a maniac. The Parisian bar had been revealed to me as an institution that commits vile acts under the shelter of the laws, but the world of art now appears to me fairy-like and perfect, gloriously adorned with the halo created in my dreams.

I open my doors without discrimination to all I meet, and soon my delightful apartment and my peace acquired with so much difficulty are somewhat spoiled. Under one pretext a sculptor comes every day to work in the corner I have reserved for sculpture, and after him come others—a musician, a painter, a pastellist, a poet; I know not who else. For a time all this appears to me comic and delightful—and then, I repeat to myself every afternoon at the Opera Comique, "These people are poor; it is right that they should have the use of my studio, my tools and my fire."

But soon they impose further on me; they anchor themselves and they share my table. There is nothing more picturesque than this "vie de boheme" when one is young, gay and free. When I come home to dinner they salute me with bravos, they bear me around the room in triumph. Ah! I shall be responsible for many works of art which without me would never have been born, and that thought makes me bear everything.

Precocious Operatic Triumphs in Paris

The girl pastellist of my circle has adopted two children out of kindness—at least she tells me so. When separated from her they weep, and so they must come with her. The artists protest, and the children are driven into my bedroom, my only refuge. But the masterpieces are growing up, and perhaps when the Summer comes they will leave me.

Gentle peace did not live in the studio more than two months. Rivalries broke out, and everyone wanted to be master. They grew jealous and spiteful. "Surely," they said, referring to me, "she has some intrigue. She loves one of us and is fooling the others, who are useful as a screen."

Who was the chosen one? To find him they played all sorts of tricks on one another. When anybody went out when the day's work came to an end, they were always on the watch. If one of the men stayed late another came back to look for something he had forgotten, and he kept on looking for it until the first one went away. In one way and another they made life insupportable for me.

They made such incessant demands on my Eugenie that she collapsed in tears on my bosom and said:

"Ah! Madame, let us go away from here. We shall never get rid of them."

I did not know how to turn them out. I had pity on the embryonic works of art, and then I had given so much that I had not the heart to take away everything. Every day I said, "I shall find a way," and still the infernal life continued.

I was very much occupied outside, for I had made my debut at the Opera Comique. It was a wonderful event for me. I won a brilliant success; the critics pronounced me "original," and I was proud of being regarded as an innovator. I did not, however, feel the intoxication of success which would have been proportionate to my original ambition. After that I was rather surprised to find that whenever I succeeded in anything I merely felt an agreeable satisfaction.

At last I knew that happiness lies not in success, but in the quest, the effort, the labor. It is the ascent which arouses my passion, the summit only interests me if it reveals the higher summits and gives me an opportunity to renew the ascension. To have an ideal is to see the goal ever retreating as one approaches. It is a phantom that flies, but which enthralls us as it flies, and it is only that which matters.

I have made my debut, I have made a success, I am on the road to further triumphs, but I find that there is something else I need in my now free and victorious life—and that is love. It is there, quite near me; my troubled life has prepared me for it, but I do not yet understand. I do not know that amid the tangled threads of my destiny a golden one is shining. Soon I shall perceive it and obediently follow it, in spite of all obstacles.

Among my trying artist friends one alone understood me. The intelligent and sickly poet interested me and appealed to my sympathies. But I found it was almost impossible to speak to him in private. Four active jailers were watching over my virtue.

We were, therefore, very often driven to the expedient of exchanging books under the noses of the others while they worked. Sometimes he read to me in a low voice, and from time to time he would introduce into the text charming phrases that gave me a little thrill. But still I knew that he was not the one for whom I was waiting—the one who was to unlock the Gates of Paradise and teach me the uttermost joys of life.

Then there came a wonderful day in Springtime, whe I was still singing at the Opera Comique in Paris. Th bohemians were occupying my studio as usual and makin life difficult. Before me lay a freshly completed volum of manuscript in a red cover, bearing the pompous titl "The Philosophy of Happiness." I have not yet told yo that I was an author, but I had indeed been a prolific on for several years.

I was only eighteen, I had always been unhappy, an yet for years I had been covering innumerable sheets o paper with joyous and optimistic principles.

My tenacious friends are grouped around me, each a his own work. There is the sculptor called "Pepper mint"—nobody knows why. There is the painter calle "The Monk," on account of his long beard and the san dals he wears. There is "The Flame," the attractiv auburn-haired pastellist, and there is her contrasting sis ter, "Tanagra," the graceful pianist. We are awaitin the poet, surnamed "The Infant (of Spain)" on accoun of his long, pale face and his aristocratic gestures.

Eugenie blows in like a breeze, with a broom in he hand and a cloth tied round her head to preserve her jet black hair from the dust. She hustles about the apart ment, scolding good-naturedly.

From behind the easel a plaintive voice addressin Eugenie as usual by her Wagnerian name, cries out:

"Brangaene, I am hungry."

Everybody choruses, "Brangaene, we are hungry."

"Don't make such a noise," scolds Eugenie. "I wi serve the chocolate when the Infant arrives."

Then my wise little servant looks at the sculptor' statue with the air of a connoisseur, and observes, "That is really a magnificent work that Peppermint is creating."

Everybody laughs. Then the bell rings and the Infan enters, coughs a little and wipes his forehead, for ther are many steep stairs to my studio. Finally he place two books before me.

"There, Isolde, I have brought you some books by Maeterlinck. That will surely interest you."

"By Maeterlinck!" I exclaimed with an indescribable